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ABSTRACT

Drawing on phonological, grammatical, and usage data collected during personal interviews and taped sessions, this paper seeks to determine whether and how persons of Finnish descent, collectively or individually by generation, constitute dialect islands within the local dialect area (Marquette, Michigan), and their effect upon one another. The study also attempts to resolve some misconceptions about the Finglish dialect (English that conforms to Finnish spelling, pronunciation, inflection, and syntax on a highly idiosyncratic basis) and to investigate its effects upon the English language. A section on Finnish and Finglish vocabulary is also included. (Author/DB)

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A Dialect Survey Involving Persons of Finnish Descent

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This paper describes and summarizes the results of a survey conducted for a graduate linguistics seminar. The survey was individually devised and evaluated in a limited time span which governs its scope and conclusiveness. Without being comprehensive it does yield data on specific characteristics of the dialects of three generations of persons of Finnish descent residing in an area around Marquette, Michigan, and on these groups as compared with local usage. The proximity of three generations of its users or three stages in its evolution presents an ideal opportunity for an exercise in dialect development.

With the exception of the control group all of the information was collected during personal interviews and taped sessions. The general purpose was to determine whether and how persons of Finnish descent, collectively or individually by generation, constitute dialect islands within the local dialect area, and their effect upon one another. Phonological, grammatical, and usage data from the three groups plus data on grammar and usage from a control group was accumulated. There is also a section on Finnish and Finglish vocabulary. A summary of the Introduction,

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which seeks to resolve some misconceptions about the dialect and to investigate its effects upon the English language, is given here.

What is Finglish?

Unlike his Scandinavian counterpart the Finnish immigrant to the United States found little similarity between and no cognates in his language and the language of the new country. Finnish, classified with the Ural-Altaic family of languages, is highly inflected utilizing fifteen cases. It has few prepositions and distinguishes eight vowel sounds. The Finnish alphabet does not use the letters b, c, f, g, w, x, and z; some are found in borrowed words. The immigrants' process of improvisation in adapting to English has been coined 'Finglish' and characterizes one group in this survey. In written form the dialect is usually deliberately humorous; however, individual communications and advertisements in Finnish publications use it as well.

It has been unrealistically suggested that Finglish was contrived as a compromise language between parents who understood no English and children who understood no Finnish. However, it is not a separate language; it is English that conforms to Finnish

spelling, pronunciation, inflection, and syntax on a highly idiosyncratic basis and requires a degree of proficiency in both languages. Occasionally Finnish vocabulary is employed, as the conjunction ja 'and', or compounds are formed from both languages, as heinä-baana 'haybarn'. The influence of residual Swedish words transplanted by the immigrants but long since replaced in the Finnish vocabulary also is seen, as in petiruuma 'bedroom'. In spoken form Finglish passes almost unnoticed by its users; its written humor appeals primarily to the bilingual first generation Americans who interpret it as just directed at their nationality. Succeeding generations may find it difficult to read and hence not humorous. Because modern day immigrants generally learn English before coming to the United States, and because second generation Finnish descendants generally do not learn Finnish, the Finglish dialect will undoubtedly cease to be used or read. The survey verifies predictions made by Wahlgren in American Speech in 1949, 'it seems inevitable that Finglish will gradually disappear from use ... Finglish seems destined not to survive.'[1]

The effect of Finglish per se upon English is not a legitimate avenue of investigation because it affects every English word it utilizes. It is itself an effect.

The Questionnaire

The phonological variant possibilities used in the survey were taken from a questionnaire in nationwide use by A. L. and I. N. Davis. Their informant requirements were not relevant to this study and were not adhered to. Also, this section was not used with the control group.

The usage items were compiled from solicited suggestions on typically local forms. Both a revision of several of the items and a larger sampling are needed. According to the linguistic atlases several of the items show nationwide deviation not considered in these local comparisons.

The Finnish-English section investigates the proficiency of each group in these areas. The case endings were verified with Mencken's The American Language, page 676.[2]

The original objectives of the survey were modified to manageable scope. A thorough study of the dialect should incorporate a section in an area in which it most obviously manifests itself, that of the suprasegmental phonemes. Information on stress, pitch, and juncture in informants' speech would require accurate recording equipment and not a little training in

the interpretation of data. This survey provides information on:

(1) Pronunciation of some traditionally variant forms by Finnish informants and how these pronunciations are reflected in success in generations.

(2) The frequency of items of vocabulary and grammar established as typical local usage by a control group in use by persons of Finnish descent.

(3) The degree to which these persons may constitute 'dialect islands' within the local dialect area.

(4) The extent to which Finnish and Finglish vocabulary are understood by generations succeeding the immigrants.

(5) The number of Finnish words which have become local usage as shown by the control group.

Informants and Survey Summaries

Group IV. The eighteen informants in this group function as the control section of the Usage, Finnish-Finglish part of the survey. A senior high school class constitutes the majority of the group; the other informants represent an older age group. A sampling is needed which would include informants from as many age, occupational, social, and economic categories as possible.

This group, with few exceptions, was unable to complete the Finnish-Finglish section. One item of exception was sauna and one informant knew joo 'yes', makkara 'sausage', ei 'no', maki 'hill', and Suomi 'Finland'. A qualified conclusion is that very few Finnish words are known by non-Finns in this area. Sauna alone seems to constitute the effect of Finnish upon English locally as well as nationwide. However, its vogue status, as with the once popular sisu 'stamina', has not been determined. Few in the control group were able to read Finglish; comprehension may have been greater upon hearing it read.

Group I. This limited sampling included persons who immigrated to the United States forty or more years ago. All are partially bilingual, but their spoken and written choice is usually Finnish. They speak English in varying degrees of proficiency. Only one in this survey completed the usage section of the questionnaire; it did not seem advantageous to request this because errors in grammar abound in their speech in spite of their efforts to 'speak good English.' English orthography proves to be less logical than their own. The phonological section sought typical Finnish pronunciations of these words. The responses include:

/tʃ/ in church, chimney, and children: the standard /tʃ/ occurred only twice out of six opportunities given. /s/ is substituted.

/θ/ in three, thousand, thursday, theater, and length: the informants used /θ/ only twice out of ten times. /t/ is substituted.

/dʒ/ in judge, genuine, and January: /dʒ/ occurred five of six times; on one occasion it was substituted with /s/ (genuine).

/v/ and /w/ in twelve, governor, water, and twice: on survey items there was no confusion of the two phonemes. In conversation confusion was apparent in we /vi/ and excavation /ɛkskəweʃən/.

/z/ in Thursday, oranges, and other final /z/ phonemes: in no solicited item and in no conversation did /z/ occur; it is always substituted with /s/.

These are some of the common pronunciation substitutions; they are not always consistent but become predictable on an individual basis. They are the building blocks of Finglish coupled with confusion of plural and singular, verb inflections, and negative forms that conform to Finnish rather than English construction.

Group II. The seven persons who functioned as informants for this group are children of immigrants

from Finland and are approximately fifty to sixty years of age. All are bilingual but English is their primary spoken and written choice. Five of the informants completed high school; all completed elementary school; one took college level courses. Finnish was the language of their childhood homes and religious education, which often included instruction in Finnish grammar. Informants became proficient in English at an early age and continued its use in their own homes. However, they often select Finnish in their communication with one another and frequently subscribe to Finnish publications.

In the Usage section of the survey 210 items of grammar and vocabulary were analyzed. Group II deviated from the control group average thirty-four times or 16% of their choices. High frequency items of grammatical deviation were: going show, can I go?, who for whom, I want out, and by (to) Joan's. Table I gives the percentage and direction of deviation; some are corrections of control group errors.

Six of the seven informants use the word pank, which probably had its origin in underground mining terminology, whereas more than one-half of the control group did not know the meaning of the word. Also, Group II makes a distinction between cellar and basement

suggesting that word choice may be indicative of age. The degree of deviation may be sufficient or may be a contributing factor in isolating this group as a dialect island within the survey area.

In the Finglish-Finnish section, all informants translated the Finnish vocabulary and the Finglish haussi 'house' with its fifteen case endings, as well as peipiooki 'baby buggy'. As expected, Group II translated a Finglish paragraph with ease. A written paragraph showed no grammatical or spelling errors and competence in organization.

Group III. The seven informants in this group represent the second generation of persons of Finnish descent born in the United States. Few of this group are bilingual and have at best an understanding of few to many Finnish words. Occasionally one is able to comprehend much spoken Finnish but is unable to speak it himself. Those bilingual in this group very likely lived with a Finnish speaking person. Four of this survey group have college degrees; three are high school graduates now in college.

Group III showed 1.7 times as much deviation from the control group as did Group II. Table I lists the following as items of high deviation which show a

correlation with Group II: going show, him and me (subject), who for whom, can I go, I want out, and pank. Other items of high frequency deviation not seen in Group II are ain't, I seen, going game, and he don't. Group III showed less use of the word quickest in the comparative degree (43%) than did Group II (100%) or the control group (83%). It is interesting to note that one of the items of closest correlation between all three groups was wish I was, which confirms Marckwardt's observation in Facts About Current English Usage of the decay of the inflected subjunctive in informal English.[3] The higher degree of deviation may be sufficient to isolate Group III persons on the basis of usage alone. While they corrected control group grammatical errors eleven times, they added several of their own. They show a consistency with many Group II deviations and seem to reflect the influence of the Finnish characteristic of using post-positions rather than prepositions to a greater degree. They omitted prepositions one-half of the times the opportunity was given. Group III translated 80% of the Finnish vocabulary, but the case endings proved an alien tongue. More than half translated the Finglish paragraph indicating that the dialect will be read a while longer.

Phonological Comparisons

The survey records in phonemic transcription comparative data from 100 items recorded by two representatives from each generation group. Groups II and III were analyzed in comparison to Group I, the immigrants. Some of the items which show a possible correlation are indicated on Table II. They include:

Hundred: Group I showed a typical difficulty with /d/ in the final position; this was reflected once in Group II, i.e. /hʌnəret/. Group II used /d/.

Grandmother: all three groups omitted /d/. Group I substituted /ð/ with /t/ and /θ/. Group I /θ/ was not repeated.

Beautiful: there was greater similarity between Groups I and III i.e. /d/ than with Group II who said /t/. The final vowel sound was modified from /u/ to /ʊ/ to /ə/.

Length: one Group I variation, /lɛnθ/, was reflected once in Group II and both times in Group III.

Chimney: All three groups showed a final /ɪ/ whereas the observed standard is closer to /i/.

Interesting: again Group III conformed to Group I with three syllables, whereas Group II used four. The latter exhibits a tendency toward precise pronunciation

of all phonemes.

Without: only Group II was uniform; Group III reflects one of the variations shown by Group I, /wɪʔaʊt/, and one of the Group II variations, /wɪɾaʊt/, which is typical in the Northern Dialect area.[4]

Because: Group I showed a final /s/. The initial vowel sound of Group I was reflected once in Group III. Only Grour III showed the typical Northern Dialect Area pronunciation, /ɒɪkəz/.

The area of phonology remains incomplete without data on the suprasegmental phonemes; it is from these less easily differentiated deviations that comparisons are often made and attitudes formed. The survey offers an indication of some possible correlations between informants' pronunciations. Group III, the second generation of descendants, shows an interesting relationship to Group I, the immigrants. Whether all groups constitute dialect islands on the basis of phonological data requires weighing against a local norm. It is obvious that Group I is a very distinct dialect group and it seems apparent that there is reflection of this in succeeding generations.

The limitations of an initial study are clear and the findings are not necessarily quintessential. Directions for further study have been suggested; their pursuit will contritute substantially to an excercise in dialect development.

Comparative Data - Usage Survey

Item	Group II	Group III	Group IV
Going show	57%	57%	0%
Him and me (subject)	14%	14%	0%
Who for whom	71%	57%	22%
Can I go	14%	0%	82%
I want out	28%	57%	100%
Pank	86%	100%	27%
Ain't	0%	100%	16%
I seen	0%	57%	11%
Going game	14%	43%	16%
He don't	0%	28%	5%
Quickest (comparative)	100%	43%	83%
Wish I was	57%	43%	44%
By (to) Joan's	28%	86%	100%
Cellar	43%	85%	100%

Table I. The item as used by the approximate percentage of two generation groups and the control group.

Phonological Variants

Item	Group I	Group II	Group III
Hundred	/hʌndɬt/	/hʌndred/	/hʌnɑred/
	/hʌndret/	/hʌnɑret/	/hʌndred/
Grandmother	/ɡræ nmʌtɬ/	/ɡræ nmʌðɜ/	/ɡræ nmʌðɜ/
	/ɡræ nmʌθɜ/	/ɡræ nmʌðɜ/	/ɡræ nmʌðɜ/
Beautiful	/bɪudɪful/	/bɪutɪful/	/bɪudɪfəl/
	/bɪudɪful/	/bɪutɪful/	/bɪudɪfəl/
Length	/lɛŋt/	/lɛŋθ/	/lɛnθ/
	/lɛnθ/	/lɛnθ/	/lɛnθ/
Chimney	/sɪmni/	/ʂɪmnɪ/	/tʃɪmnɪ/
	/sɪmnɪ/	/tʃɪmnɪ/	/tʃɪmnɪ/
Interesting	/ɪntrɛstɪŋ/	/ɪntʒɛstɪŋ/	/ɪntrɛstɪŋ/
	/ɪntrɛstɪŋ/	/ɪntʒɛstɪŋ/	/ɪntrɛstɪŋ/
Without	/wɪtsut/	/wɪʒsut/	/wɪʒsut/
	/wɪθsut/	/wɪʒsut/	/wɪθsut/
Because	/bikos/	/bikɜz/	/bikɜz/
	/bɪkɒs/	/bikɜz/	/bɪkəz/

Table II. Phonological variations of each generation group.

Notes

[1]Selma Stiri Saalman, 'The Finnish Language in the United States,' American Speech 24 (1949), 14-15.

[2]H. L. Mencken, The American Language (New York, 1937), 676.

[3]Albert H. Marckwardt, Fred Walcott, NCTE Monograph, No. 2 (New York, 1938), 89.

[4]Jean Malmstrom, Annabel Ashley, 'The Main Dialect Areas of the U. S. A.,' Dialects, U. S. A. in Exposition and the English Language, James Sanderson and Walter Gordon, ed. (New York, 1969), 395.

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